

How Modern Artists Draw From History

Image no: 1

Caption: Bharti Kher, *Shit heads from the Intermediaires Series*, 2019, Cement, clay, wax, brass, copper Dimensions variable, Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

Link: N/A

Image no: 2

Caption: Tyeb Mehta, *Drummer*, 1988, Oil on canvas, 115 x 90 cm, MAC.00459, Museum of Art & Photography, Bengaluru.

Link:

https://map.cumulus.co.in/client/map/collection#/search/2816?src=srh&q=drummer&oq=12&_qtp=_flt&view=grid&searchField=Department&sortBy=UserNumber3&sortOrder=ASC

Image no: 3

Caption: LN Tallur, *floccinaucinihilipilification (prototype) 103*, 2021, Print on bronze, 27.9 x 15.2 x 15.2 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Chemould Prescott Road, Mumbai.

Link:

<https://www.gallerychemould.com/artists/48-tallur-ln/works/5749-tallur-ln-floccinaucinihilipilification-prototype-103-2021/>

Image no: 4

Caption: Adam Jones, *Sculpture at Nageshwara Temple, Kumbakonam, India*, Wikimedia Commons (2009). [CC BY-SA 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/).

Link: <https://www.zarina.work/life>

Image no: 5

Caption: Jean-Pierre Dalbéra, *Episode from one of the Buddha's past lives (Ajanta, India)*
Princely couple in a set of scenes from the Vessantara Jataka, painting under the porch of
Vihara No. 17, 2020, Flickr. [CC BY 2.0](#).

Link: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dalbera/50664950763/in/album-72157651307405885/>

Image no: 6

Caption: Amol Gaitonde, *Hampi*, 2008, Wikimedia Commons. [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hampi_11-1-2008_11-48-24_AM.JPG

Image no: 7

Caption: *Shiva as Lord of Dance (Nataraja)*, c. 11th century, Copper Alloy, 68.3 x 56.5 cm, 1987.80.1,
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Gift of R. H. Ellsworth Ltd., in honour of Susan Dillon,
1987.

Link: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/39328>

Image no: 8

Caption: Sailko, *Sadashiva sculpture in CSMVS*, Mumbai, 10th century CE, Buff sandstone,
Wikimedia Commons. [CC BY 3.0](#).

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sadashiva,_dal_madhya_pradesh,_X_secolo.jpg

Image no: 9

Caption: *Standing Parvati*, c. first quarter of the 10th century, Copper alloy, 69.5 cm, 57.51.3, The
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bequest of Cora Timken Burnett, 1956.

Link: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/39325>

Image no: 10

Caption: Sudhir Patwardhan, *Compass*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 91.44 x 203.2 cm, Published in “Sudhir Patwardhan’s Spectres illuminates the intimate space of home”, *Architectural Digest*, October 2017.

Link:

<https://www.architecturaldigest.in/content/sudhir-patwardhan-spectres-jehangir-art-gallery/>

Image no: 11

Caption: Sudhir Patwardhan, *The Abstractionist*, 2005, Published in “Walking Through Soul City Ek Sair Ruh ke Sheher mé”, *Domus India*, December 2020.

Link:

<https://www.magzter.com/stories/Architecture/Domus-India/Walking-Through-Soul-City-Ek-Sair-Ruh-ke-Sheher-m>

Image no: 12

Caption: Sudhir Patwardhan, *Eclectic*, 2005, Acrylic on canvas, 121.92 x 198.12 cm, © Sudhir Patwardhan and The Guild, Mumbai.

Link: N/A

Image no: 13

Caption: Sailko, *Sadashiva sculpture in CSMVS*, Mumbai, Wikimedia Commons. [CC BY 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/).

Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sadashiva,_dal_madhya_pradesh,_X_secolo.jpg

Image no: 14

Caption: *The Hindu Goddess Bhudevi*, 13th century, Copper alloy, 81.28 x 30.48 x 16.51 cm, M.70.5.3, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California.

Link: <https://collections.lacma.org/node/236865>

Image no: 15

Caption: LN Tallur, *Panic Room*, 2006, Jute sacks, blowers, steel plate, Courtesy of the artist.

Link: http://www.tallur.com/projects/files/gimgs/141_094-tallurln-2663.jpg

Image no: 16

Caption: LN Tallur, *Coherence*, 2019, Cast Stone, Produced with the support from Grounds For Sculpture and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Courtesy of the artist.

Link: http://www.tallur.com/projects/files/gimgs/139_016-tallurln-1801.jpg

Image no: 17

Caption: LN Tallur, *Fringe*, 2019, Crush Bone, bone meal, char bone and synthetic glue, 548.64 x 365.76 x 365.76 cm, Produced with support from Philadelphia Museum of Art & Grounds For Sculpture, Courtesy of the artist.

Link: <http://tallur.com/projects/works/fringe-/>

Image no: 18

Caption: LN Tallur, *Obituary Note*, 2013, Burnt wood and bronze, 162 x 185 x 104 cm, Courtesy of the artist.

Link: N/A

Image no: 19

Caption: *Shiva as Lord of Dance (Shiva Nataraja)*, late 12th–early 13th century, Copper alloy, 65.4 x 55.9 x 19.7 cm, 64.251, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1964.

Link:

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/39329?ft=Nataraja&offset=0&rpp=40&pos=2>

Image no: 20

Caption: LN Tallur, *Unicode*, 2011, Bronze, coins and concrete, 152 x 183 x 117 cm, Courtesy of the artist.

Link: N/A

Image no: 21

Caption: Frank Bond, *A Cremation Ceremony*, 1944, BOND 0068, Bond Photograph Library, Digital South Asia Library.

Link: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_Cremation_Ceremony_\(BOND_0068\).jpeg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_Cremation_Ceremony_(BOND_0068).jpeg)

Image no: 22

Caption: LN Tallur, *Milled History*, 2014, Yellow teakwood, sand stone, 62 x 185 x 32cm, Courtesy of the artist.

Link: N/A

Image no: 23

Caption: *Vishnu*, between 900 and 950, Granite, 129.5 x 38.1 cm, 1963.104.2, The Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio. John L. Severance Fund.

Link:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:South_India,_Tamil_Nadu,_probably_Pudokkatai,_early_Chola_Dynasty,_10th_Cen_-_Vishnu_-_1963.104.2_-_Cleveland_Museum_of_Art.tif

Image no: 24

Caption: LN Tallur, Detail, *Milled History*, 2014, Yellow teakwood, sand stone, Courtesy of the artist.

Link: <http://www.tallur.com/index.html>

Image no: 25

Caption: LN Tallur, Detail, *Milled History*, 2014, Yellow teakwood, sand stone, Courtesy of the artist.

Link: <http://www.tallur.com/index.html>

Image no: 26

Caption: *Video footage taken in the complex of Ellora caves and temples.* Ellora Aurangabad Maharashtra India, Envato Elements.

Link:

<https://elements.envato.com/video-footage-taken-in-the-complex-of-ellora-caves-D7GKNF6>

Image no: 27

Caption: *Stone carvings at Western Group of Temples, Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh,* Envato Elements.

Link:

<https://elements.envato.com/stone-carvings-at-western-group-of-temples-khajura-UGVK377>

Across modern and contemporary Indian art, we often find references to figurative imagery from paintings and sculptures that date back to the subcontinent's historical past. These have served as pedagogical tools as well as sources of inspiration for artists. Let's examine how representations of early medieval sculptures and bronzes, among others, have informed the practices of Indian artists in unique ways.

Tracing Lineages

Mumbai-based artist Sudhir Patwardhan (b. 1949), known for his rich portrayals of urban life, has also created a number of paintings that focus on the artist's studio. His painting, *The Eclectic* (2005), shows us how the subcontinent's past serves as inspiration for his artistic practice.

The painting features the artist standing in his studio, looking out of a window facing a surreal landscape. Among the various pieces of furniture and canvases that line the walls of this space, we find a sculptural head discreetly propped on top of a cabinet in a corner. A closer look reveals that this is a representation of the Hindu God Shiva that seems to be based on the front face of a three-headed Pratihara sculpture from the 10th century. On the other side of the room, we see a painted canvas of a Chola bronze sculpture angled against a bookshelf on the floor.

By including a self-portrait within the composition he traces a direct trajectory from the 10th century to the present day.

Let's now look at how the artist, LN Tallur (b. 1971), known for his large-scale installations references historical South Asian sculptures to critique contemporary society.

Recontextualising Histories: Subverting Traditional Meaning

Tallur's works, *Obituary Note* (2013) and *Unicode* (2011), both reference traditional iconography of the Nataraja, a depiction of the Hindu God Shiva in the

role of a divine cosmic dancer, encircled by a flamed halo. In Obituary Note, Tallur places charred wood taken from funeral pyres in India. This wooden core invokes notions of world destruction, while cleverly nodding at the cremation ground upon which the Shiva Nataraja dances. Similarly, in Unicode, the artist places a concrete ball embedded with coins, critiquing the negative effects of capitalism and urban development on history and tradition.

In another work, Milled History (2014, 2016), Tallur features a replica of a temple sculpture, resembling Vishnu figures from Tamil Nadu, that has been infested with termites and ants. Here he comments on the decay and destruction of tradition more literally by representing a slow wreckage of history.

From serving as direct sources of inspiration worthy of replication to rich referential material in more conceptual works, the diverse ways in which artists engage with art history reveal the importance that the past continues to hold for our present and future. Traditional forms of art furthermore lend themselves to constant experimentation and redefinition, allowing us to look at history in more imaginative ways.

Postscript

Sudhir Patwardhan is a self-taught artist, and a practising radiologist who was born in Pune in 1949 and currently lives and works in Thane, in the greater Mumbai area, India.

LN Tallur was born in Karnataka, India in 1971 and divides his time between India and South Korea.

Bibliography

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Vali, Murtaza. “Murtaza Vali on Tallur L. N.” The online edition of Artforum International Magazine, November 30, 2019.

<https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/201909/tallur-l-n-81143>.

This document is part of the course ‘Modern & Contemporary Indian Art,’ authored by Dr Beth Citron. Click [here](#) to start learning.

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